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## Arts

# Asylum/Cobu/Pare, Dance at FringeNYC



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Of the 187 Fringe shows scattered across lower Manhattan, dance mainly takes place at venue #15, so far west that it risks landing in the Hudson, where much of it last weekend belonged.

*Asylum*, by the Nashville troupe Uprock, promised hilarious tastelessness – a perennial Fringe attraction – which its less-than-amateur execution delivered intermittently. Between extended pauses in which the brave dancers engaged in vague shadow play behind upturned hospital cots, the hip-hop ballet offered before and after scenes. The vulnerable characters first appeared on the street, where the damage was done, then in the ward, where they relived their trauma in hallucinations.

In one outrageous number, a young mother whose baby had been catapulted out of her arms by the homeless driver of a shopping cart engaged in a pas de trois with hospital orderlies wearing

huge papier-mâché bald-baby heads. In another, a janitor's coughing fit transmogrified into a hip-hop beat for an asylum boogie.

Also typically Fringe was the monomania behind former Stomp star Yako Miyamoto's *Cobu*. Mining the theatrical and choreographic possibilities of women banging on big drums, her seven-member troupe seemed half-witch, half samurai, in their yoking of martial exactitude and demonic energy. They leapt into the air to thwack the cauldron-shaped taiko drums with thick sticks and dashed from drum to drum in myriad geometries.

Unlike the Uprockers, Miyamoto put on a tight show, with colourful costume additions – long vests, samurai pantaloons, sequined midriff wraps – designating separate numbers. But there is a reason taiko favours short sets. An hour and a half of drumming, no matter what the accessory thrills, is too much. Infusions of lighter fare such as tap dance only made the time wander and the show grow dilute.

The Covent Ballet Theatre of Brooklyn may have given off a whiff of school recital on opening night, with so many of the performers' families in the house, but bringing to story ballet the social conscience of modern dance circa the 1920s and '30s suits the combo-crazy Fringe. A historical fiction of a ballet, *Orphan Train* was inspired by the thousands of New York urchins sent west from 1853 until 1929 to be adopted by farm families.

Choreographer Marla Hirokawa made excellent use of the mix of children and adults in patterns that were simple without ever being dull and that cleanly telegraphed mood. Her libretto, however, gave me pause. Many fairy-tales risk the hero's life and many more subject a motherless child to wicked witches and stepmothers, but how many have the hero himself die – only to replace him cheerfully with another child? The little boy in my row who had been peppering his father with questions on murky plot points was dumbstruck by that one.

Still more deserving of a "What were they thinking?" award was *Pare*, dance's doubling answer to the solipsistic monologues endemic at the Fringe. Real-life husband and wife Kevin Brown and Robin Neveu Brown – he an actor, she a dancer – performed scenes from a unilaterally violent marriage. Wife transitioned from translucent nightie to Victoria's Secret bare minimum, and writhed about in quasi-pornographic suffering when not being throttled. Husband was fully clothed, with the shaggy beard and heavy boots of a homicidal woodsman. The movement lurched between abstract renditions of violence and actual hitting. Psychobabble erupted from

ponderous silences. His father was a violent drunk, the husband offered by way of explanation for choking his wife.

Whatever its creators' intentions, *Pare* came across as performance therapy. The Browns should have paid *us*.

★★★★☆

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